

AKHBARAT-I-LAHOUR-O-MULTAN.

[By Sardar Ganda Singh, M.A.]

It was by a mere accident that in 1931 I came to know from a *sherbet*-seller of Jhang of the existence of a number of Persian manuscripts in the house of a Muslim potter in Multan. The owner could give me no information as to how his people came to possess them. He was an illiterate man and so was his deceased father who seems to have purchased them from the descendants of some old *Munshi* in that town. In exchange for a maund of old English newspapers I rescued a basketful of manuscripts and two *bastas* of loose papers from the ravages of the old lady of the house who had, a few minutes before, put as many of them in a tub of water for reducing them to pulp for the manufacture of mud baskets.

The leather-bound manuscripts included, among other books, three volumes of the Office diaries (in Persian) of the Lahore Darbar, containing copies of *farmans* and *parwanas* from the capital to the various sardars and officials during the month of Magh Samvat 1904 Bk. and Jeth, Assuj and Phagan, 1905 Bk., the year preceding the annexation of the Punjab, a Persian account-book of the Sikh troops stationed at Peshawar from Chaitra to Bhadon Samvat 1905; with the signature of George Lawrence, and an autobiography and correspondence of Maulavi Sayyad Rajjab Ali Khan, who was for a long time *Mir Munshi* to the Agent to the Governor-General on the Sikh frontier and later on to the British Resident at Lahore. Another volume which deserves no less mention contains the correspondence of the Agents to the Governor-General with the Maharajas of Patiala and their *vakils*, officials, etc., etc., from October 3, 1803, to January 3, 1823.

The *bastas*, called *rumals* in Maharashtra, contained, along with many other documents and booklets, a bundle of *Akhbarat* or news-letters from Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, Ahmadpur, etc., from August, 1848 to January, 1849 when the Multan rebellion of Diwan Mulraj, which ultimately resulted in the annexation of the Punjab to the dominions of the East India Company, was at its highest pitch. The Multan rebellion, as we know, started with the murderous attacks upon Lieutenants Vans Agnew and Anderson on April 19, 1848, and ended with the dissolution of the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab on March 30, 1849 by the proclamation of Lord Dalhousie. Multan had fallen with the surrender of Mulraj on January 20, 1849. The *Akhbarat*, referred to above, therefore, cover the most eventful period of the great tragedy. They are headed as *Akhbar-i-Darbar-i-Lahaur*, *Akhbar-i-Multan*, etc., which goes to show that they were written for the information of some one beyond the boundaries of the Sikh kingdom, and, from the fact that Diwan Mulraj, Raja Sher Singh, and his father Sardar Chatar Singh Atariwala, and their friends are referred to as *namak-haram* and *badshat*, traitors and rascals, and the British Resident at Lahore as *Sahib-i-Kalan*, great gentleman, and the officers and soldiers of the British army as *sahiban-i-alishan* and *dilawaran-i-jang-i-sarkar-i-englishia bahadur*, splendid gentlemen and warriors of the brave English government, it is clear that the writer or the compiler of the *Akhbarat* is neither a Sikh himself nor sympathetically disposed towards the insurgents. Most of the *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Lahaur* bear at the bottom the name of Rai Harsaran Das *akhbar navis Darbar Lahaur*. Although there is no conclusive evidence to say for whom they were written, it may be gleaned from occasional references in some of the enclosures and separate sheets (*parcha-i-alahda*) that, in all probability, they were compiled for the information of the Maharajah of Patiala.

The news-letters are seventy in number and cover about 360 pages of 11" x 6" with an average of 17 lines to a page. They are rich in details of a very important nature and, in addition to the day-to-day news from different places, bring out the following points which should be of considerable help in the reconstruction of a detailed history of the Multan and Hazara tragedies and

subsequent events, and in the interpretation and understanding of the policy of the then Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, towards the Punjab.

Throughout the rebellion and the disturbances in the north-west, the Lahore Darbar, the council of ministers and chiefs who ruled on behalf and in the name of the minor Maharaja Duleep Singh, remained friendly towards the East India Company.

The British Resident at Lahore continued to exercise the fullest power in all political and military matters of the kingdom, with "full authority to direct and control all matters in every department of the state" vested in him by the Governor-General under the terms of the treaty of Bhyrowala of December 1846.

It was in compliance with his instructions that the Darbar sent men and munitions of war and commissariat stores regularly to Multan and other places for the suppression of the rebellion.

It was again in obedience to his orders that the Lahore Darbar issued orders on August 23, 1848, for the recall of Sardar Chatar Singh Atariwala, the governor of Hazara, and his son Sardar Avtar Singh, and for the appointment of Sardar Jhanda Singh to officiate in his place in accordance with the wishes and advice (*ba-mutabiq-marzi-o-salah*) of Captains Abbott and Nicholson, with instructions to Col. Bhup Singh, Col. Bahadur Singh, Col. Budh Singh, Babu Pandey, Col. Nur-ud-Din, General Sultan Mahmud and other military officers "to be faithful and obedient to the afore-said *sahibs*." [Akh. L. August 23-25, 1848.]

As desired by the Resident, the Lahore Darbar issued *parwana*s to their military and civil officers to send reinforcements to Herbert Edwardes at Multan and to pay the salaries of the men under his command. [Akh. Lah. 28-8-1848.]

Throughout the period, the Darbar kept the Resident fully informed of the happenings at Multan, Hazara and other places. The Lahore Prime Minister, Raja Tej Singh, regularly sought his advice and acted upon it. The other members of the Council also occasionally saw him and assured him of their faithful adherence to their engagements with the British, kept him in touch with the political situation in the country and suggested to him measures for the suppression of the rising.

As desired by the Resident, the various Sikh forts, including the fort of Govindgarh at Amritsar, were evacuated by the soldiers of the Darbar and made over to British to be occupied and held by their troops.

Diwan Mulraj and, later on, Sardar Chatar Singh and his sons, Sardar Avtar Singh and Raja Sher Singh, and their friends like Sardars Lal Singh Muraria, Surat Singh Majithia, etc., who had taken up arms against the British in the Punjab, were looked down upon and declared as *mufsid*s, or mischief-makers, their houses were searched by the officials of the Darbar and their property confiscated to the state. (Akh. Lah. Oct. 1-3, 4-9, 1848; and also *ibid.* 1-11, 1848 for other confiscations.) A *parwana* was issued on November 1 to General Co. Landt of the Sikh service, then commanding a section of the Lahore troops at Multan against Mulraj, to send in the names of all those Sikhs who had gone over to the rebels, so that their houses and property might be confiscated.

At the suggestion of the Darbar, the Resident appointed two of his Assistant Political Officers to take charge of the *ilakas* and *jagirs* of the recalcitrant Sardars of Gujranwala, Rangarh Nangal and Murara, and administer them according to the wishes of their chief. [Akh. Lah. Oct. 4-9, 13-15, 1848.] One of these officers, on arrival at Rangarh Nangal, set fire to the houses of the Sardars. [Oct. 13-15, 1848.]

Rewards in cash and kind were granted by the Darbar, on the recommendation of the British Resident to civil and military officers, and subordinates and other ranks, for services rendered by them in the cause of the British. [Ak. L., and Dec. 12, 1848.]

Food and fodder were regularly supplied by the servants of the Darbar to the British regiments moving from their cantonments into the Punjab for the suppression of the disturbances in the country. [*Akh. L.* Oct. 21-24, 1848.] The Darbar and their agents advanced money to the British officers like John Nicholson and others whenever they stood in need of it for the expenses of the detachments and men placed under their command. [*Akh.* Oct. 30, 1848.]

The bodyguard of Maharajah Duleep Singh consisted of a cavalry regiment of the East India Company which formed a part of the British garrison of Lahore. [*Akh. Lah.* Oct. 30, 1848.]

The Lahore Darbar ordered Sardar Gulab Singh, son of the "rebel" Sardar Chatar Singh to convey personally to his father a copy of the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie's letter saying that if any harm came to the lives of the British officers in Peshawar and Hazara, it would be avenged with the blood of the sons of the Sardar, one of whom, the above Sardar Gulab Singh, was then in Lahore. [Nov. 1, 1848.]

Under the orders of the Resident it was proclaimed by beat of drum in the city of Lahore on November 1, 1848, that all the Sikh employees of the Lahore kingdom, and of the chiefs residing in the capital, should obtain passes signed by Captain Bowring; these passes they were always to carry with them, as without them they would not be permitted to enter the city or reside therein.

When Maulavi Rajjab Ali, *Mir Munshi* of the British Residency, informed the Darbar that Lala Ram Chand *Moharwala*, the custodian of the royal seal of Maharajah Duleep Singh had gone, or intended to go over to the rebels at Akalgarh, the Darbar called him to their presence, took back the seal from him and sent it on to the Resident. [Nov. 6-8, 1848.]

On the arrival of the British Commander-in-Chief at Lahore on November 12, 1848, Maharajah Duleep Singh and the chiefs of the Lahore Darbar received him with all the usual friendly formalities and presents, and fired a salute of 17 guns in his honour. In the course of conversation, Sir Hugh Gough told the Resident that their object was the protection and management (*hifazit-o-bandobast*) of the kingdom of the Maharajah, in addition to the encouragement of his friends and supporters and the suppression of the rebels. [Nov. 12, 1848.]

On November 15, the Lahore Darbar, as desired by the Resident, ordered two of its officials, Sardar Boor Singh and Diwan Kishan Lal, to accompany the Commander-in-Chief and his force to Ram Nagar (against Raja Sher Singh) to look after their comforts and supply them with food and fodder. [Nov. 16-17, 1848.]

Neither the *Akhbarat* of Lahore nor those of Multan throw any light on the circumstances under which Raja Sher Singh had to leave Multan to which place he had been deputed by the Darbar with a view to helping Lt. H. Edwards in the reduction of the stronghold of Mulraj. In the last week of November he sent from the neighbourhood of Ram Nagar, his *vakil* with two documents, one addressed to the Governor-General desiring him to remain faithful to the terms of the treaty then existing between the British and the Sikh governments, failing which the Sikh army [not of the Lahore kingdom, but the followers of a few of the Sardars who would join him] would declare war. The second document enumerated his complaints against the prime minister, Raja Tej Singh, who along with other members of the Darbar denied the correctness of the charges and said that Sher Singh and his friends were arch-rebels bent upon mischief. [*Akh. L.* Nov. 27, 1848.]

On the 27th of November, 1848, after Sher Singh's documents had been received and discussed with the members of the Darbar, the Resident ordered Sardar Atar Singh Kalianwala, Khalifa Nur-ud-Din, Diwan Ajudhia Prasad and Wazir Nihal Singh to remain with the Maharaja throughout day and night.

This order was literally obeyed by these officials of the State. [*Akh. L. Noy.* 27, 1848.]

The last news-sheet in the collection, dated Lahore the 25th of January, 1849, contains the news of the fall of Multan on Magh 12, 1905, Bk., January 22, 1849. As desired by the Resident, the Lahore Darbar fired 21 guns to celebrate the victory of Multan, and issued orders to Fuqir Shamas-ud-Din, the commander of the Govindgarh fort at Amritsar, to do the same. Khalifa Nur-ud-Din was sent to convey to the Resident congratulations on behalf of the Darbar. [January 25, 1849.]

All these points, and several others which have been omitted for want of space, show that throughout the Multan rebellion the Lahore Darbar remained faithful to the terms of the treaty with the Governor-General and was devotedly attached and obedient to the British Resident, who continued to stay undisturbed at the Sikh Capital of Lahore, controlling and directing, with full authority, all matters in every department of the state. The Darbar, throughout the period, upto the eve of the annexation of their country, was under the impression that the British troops were engaged at Multan and other places in the suppression of the rebellion of Diwan Mulraj and others on their behalf in the performance of their duty for "the preservation of the peace of the country" "during the minority of His Highness Maharajah Duleep Singh" as agreed upon by articles 7, 8 and 11 of the treaty of December, 1846, and for which an annual amount of 22 lakhs of rupees were paid to them according to article 9. It could not have been otherwise, as never was an indication to the contrary given to the Darbar either by the Resident or the Governor-General. To the last the Governor-General did not even make the formal declaration of war against Maharajah Duleep Singh or the kingdom of Lahore. Is it not a misnomer, therefore, to call the rebellion of Diwan Mulraj and others a war of the Sikh state against the British Government whose representative, the Resident, was all along, controlling and directing measures for its suppression from the Capital itself?